



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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TO: The Secretary
FROM: NEA - Harold H. Saunders

Situation in Afghanistan

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR	
REVIEWED BY <i>Lee J. Hall</i>	DATE <i>Oct. 28 '81</i>
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The Situation:

The leader of the pro-Soviet Afghan Communist (Khalq) party, Nur Mohammad Taraki has been named President of the Council of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and Prime Minister. Party members or sympathisers have been named Acting Minister of Interior, Acting Minister of Finance, and co-Ministers of Foreign Affairs. May Day has been declared a National Holiday and we may learn more about the regime's intentions from pronouncements on this occasion.

The Soviet Union has recognized the new regime.

A knowledgeable American who knows Taraki well considers him more an Afghan nationalist than pro-Soviet.

While the new regime now appears to be in full control of Kabul and most military installations throughout the country, we anticipate problems as it seeks to consolidate its position. The Khalq party is an amalgam of two Communist factions which merged last September. Sharp personality and ideological differences exist and there may be infighting among the communist leaders as they compete for power and jobs. (It is worth noting that the two co-Ministers of Foreign Affairs represent the two major factions.) There may also be serious difficulties between non-Communist elements in the military and the Communist leadership. In the longer run, the Afghan tribes, stirred up by traditional religious leaders, could create disorder in the countryside for the "pro-Soviet communists" in Kabul.

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To the best of our knowledge all the Americans in Afghanistan are unharmed and there have been no anti-American demonstrations. However, two senior AID officers on the way to the Embassy on Sunday were detained by the Military for some 2 1/2 hours and were told that the American community should reduce vehicular movement around the city and cease using two-way radios.

Policy Considerations

There are a number of considerations we will need to bear in mind as we address the various problems arising from the Afghan coup.

-- In dealing with the new situation, we must first consider the safety and welfare of about 1,000 Americans in Afghanistan.

-- We need to take into account the mix of nationalism and communism in the new leadership and seek to avoid driving the regime into a closer embrace with the Soviet Union than it might wish.

-- On the other hand, anti-regime elements in Afghanistan will be watching us carefully to see if we acquiesce in or accept the communist takeover.

-- Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and others of our friends in the area will see the situation clearly as a Soviet coup.

-- On the domestic front, many Americans will see this as an extension of Soviet power and draw the parallel with Angola, Ethiopia, etc.

ISSUES

We will need to address a number of issues during the next day or two.

1. Press Guidance: I recommend that for the time being, we take neutral line, indicating that we have had little contact with the regime so far and that we are studying the situation closely.

2. Recognition: The new government has sent a circular note to all diplomatic missions in Kabul requesting recognition. Ambassador Eliot will be sending his recommendations on Monday and we have asked our Embassies in Tehran and Islamabad for their views. We

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have already informed the three Embassies that our basic policy on recognition is to play down the question as much as possible with a view to avoidance of seeming to approve or disapprove a new government. Generally, once a regime is in control of the government and territory of the state, we find an opportunity to advise the new government of our intention to maintain diplomatic relations.

3. American Presence: This issue --which involves our basic posture toward the new government-- may not need to be addressed immediately. Much will depend, of course, on the actions of the regime and the extent to which it wants to continue a US relationship. In addition to our Embassy, we have a substantial AID presence (about 45 families) and 95 Peace Corps volunteers. Some Americans may wish to leave or send out their dependents when travel is feasible, and we believe the agencies involved should permit this. I do not think at this stage, however, that we should take the initiative to scale-down the official American presence.

Drafted by: NEA/PAB: JACoon:dc
4/30/78 ext. 20353
Concurrence: NEA/PAB: JACoon

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